



Before I Met You: A Novel

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After her grandmother Arlette's death, Betty is finally ready to begin her life. She had forfeited university, parties, boyfriends, summer jobs - all the usual preoccupations of a woman her age - in order to care for Arlette in their dilapidated, albeit charming home on the English island of Guernsey. Her will included a beneficiary unknown to Betty and her family, a woman named Clara Pickle who presumably could be found at a London address. Now, having landed on a rather shabby street corner in '90s Soho, Betty is determined to find the mysterious Clara. She's ready for whatever life has to throw her way. Or so she thinks . . .

In 1920s bohemian London, Arlette De La Mare is starting her new life in a time of postwar change. Beautiful and charismatic, she is soon drawn into the hedonistic world of the Bright Young People. But two years after her arrival in London, tragedy strikes and she flees back to her childhood home and remains there for the rest of her life.

As Betty navigates the ups and downs of city life and begins working as a nanny for a rock star tabloid magnet, her search for Clara leads her to a man - a stranger to Betty, but someone who meant the world to her grandmother. Will the secrets of Arlette's past help Betty find her own way to happiness in the present?

A rich detective story and a captivating look at London then and now, "Before I Met You" is an unforgettable novel about two very different women, separated by seventy years, but united by big hearts and even bigger dreams.

Before I Met You: A Novel Details

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Cleo Bannister says

Before I Met You is written in my favourite style, it is set in dual time-periods. Betty is in her early twenties in the 1990's when following the death of her Step-Grandmother Arlette she moves from Guernsey to Soho to trace the mysterious Clara Pickle who has been left a bequest in Arlette's will. The family have no idea who Clara Pickle is, no-one has ever heard her mentioned and as far as they know Arlette spent her whole life in Guernsey.

Lisa Jewell's writing drew me into the story immediately with the balance between Betty and Arlette's story handled well. The references to the early nineties were plentiful, I such as the status symbol of a mobile phone and the lack of anyone else with one to text, will be familiar to those of us who were there but I have to confess Arlette's story set in the 1920's was what had me hooked. Arlette had befriended an artist and some jazz musicians exploring in the time period where the social lives of well-connected young women were opening up to all sorts of new possibilities.

This is a story of two young women each making their way in the world for the first time without their families both have their fair share of adventures, misunderstandings and friendships. A lovely book with a slightly more mature feel than the earlier books I read and enjoyed by Lisa Jewell.

Anne says

I enjoy well written chick lit, but I've always avoided Lisa Jewell – I have no idea why, but I always thought she was at the “fluffy” end of the spectrum. This book is so good it really moves her out of the chick lit camp for me, it was a wonderful and really different read. If I say it reminded me of the best of JoJo Moyes, I mean it as a real compliment. Betty's 90s story – part love story, part investigation of the past – is interspersed with the story of Arlette and her life amid the bohemian set in the 1920s. The transitions are effortless, and both timeframes have a depth of detail that is absolutely captivating. Both Betty and Arlette are wonderfully drawn characters, and both stories – with their overlaps – are totally engrossing. It's a tribute to Lisa Jewell's writing that I never felt any wrench moving from one story to the other – either thread would have kept me hooked. I understand this dual-time narrative is a bit of a departure for the author, but I do regret not discovering her writing earlier – back catalogue, here I come!

Hilary Tesh says

A good idea for an interesting plot, but the author couldn't get far enough away from her usual chick lit style to do it justice. The result was much too twee for me and also littered with silly and avoidable inaccuracies. Of these, for me, the worst was on page 430: "a big, empty house on a cliff, with distant tantalising views towards the white cliffs of Dover" . The house was in Guernsey, Dover is over 200 miles away! And if distance and the earth's curvature were not a big enough obstacle, the Cherbourg Peninsula in between the two would certainly block the view. So an easy read but not my type of book!

Stacia (the 2010 club) says

He was not a boss-eyed sailor. Or a rapist. He was a legend.

...and that folks, is where I cried. There is something about a story where the truth comes out of hiding that really does something to me. While I didn't quite make it to *Jellicoe Road* snot-inducing tears, there were still plenty of buried hormones which bubbled up to the surface - enough to produce a steady stream of tears to run down my face for a couple of minutes.

I was about due for a book to stir up some emotions in me. Sometimes the apathy can actually get tiring! Experiencing *Before I Met You* felt like a jump-start to my soul. *I needed these feels!* The words were so pretty! I kid you not, **I was lying on a screwdriver in my bed and was vaguely aware of something poking me, yet I kept on reading** because I was completely enraptured by an extremely beautiful scene.

The story is set in motion when an aging woman named Arlette dies, leaving behind an inheritance to a mysterious woman named Clara Pickle. Arlette's step-granddaughter Betty is due the money should Clara not be found within a suitable amount of time. Instead of Betty waiting out the time and collecting her inheritance, she decides to go on an adventure to find the recipient of the will.

She was here.

She was here.

Her life had finally begun.

Now we're at the point where I'd normally say : adventures ensue. In the case of *Before I Met You*, I might have to word things differently. For the best adventure is not focused around Betty, even though it is her mystery to solve. All of the excitement comes from finding out about Arlette's past. The reader is hurled back in time to the 1920's as we get the pieces of Arlette's life which were unknown to the people who knew her best at the time of her death.

In the case of many books told from two viewpoints in two different time periods, there's always one viewpoint which seems to stand out as stronger than the other. At first, I would have sworn that Betty's tale would be far more fascinating. She was on her own in a new city, she had a handsome and mysterious market man take an interest in her, and she had also become a nanny for a big name musician. And while that was all well and good, Betty's story was merely the catalyst for us to find out about all things Arlette. I never really warmed up to Betty or her cares. Betty's potential musician love interest was meh. I only liked Betty's part of the story when John was in it because he was quite yummy.

Arlette stole the show. Her story captivated me. I could imagine the vividly painted picture of 1920's London, with the music and the frolicking (yes, dammit, people frolicked!) and the dancing. This was not a prohibition tale, for the atmosphere was more open in London during the time period than it was in the states. I fell in love with Godfrey, the charming musician who Arlette couldn't stay away from. This was a time where inter-racial romance was not widely accepted, except for in the clubs and dance halls, where it was all about living life to the fullest. Arlette found herself wondering if she should buck the rules in order to follow her heart, or if she should stick with the man who would be easier to have a life with.

Here she was, torn between the man who kept her safe and the man who made her feel mad with wanting.

So how does Arlette's story tie in to the unknown Clara Pickle? Well now, I can't tell you that. The book is about following Betty on her journey to find out who Clara is. By the time we get there, I felt like I'd been put through the ringer. My little heart was palpitating like crazy when the pieces finally started to come together.

This was my first book by Lisa Jewell but it will certainly not be my last. This woman can write passages which make me want to reach into the pages of the book and see the images for myself, which is so wonderful to experience. If you've read and loved Jojo Moyes (*Me Before You*, *The Girl You Left Behind*, etc.) and like books which bring together the past and present, this is going to be one you won't want to miss.

Stephanie says

I'm the only person on Goodreads so far to give this book one star. I have read all of Lisa Jewell's other books and thoroughly enjoyed them. But I just didn't care about this one. The writing was formulaic, you knew exactly what was going to happen, the characters were one dimensional and stereotypical, and overall it was rather boring. Maybe I've just out grown Lisa Jewell, but I'm sure if she wrote this novel as her first, it wouldn't have been published.

Lisa B. says

My Thoughts

This story is told in the alternating voices of Betty, from the 1990s, and Arlette, from the 1920s.

Arlette is Betty's grandmother. Betty is trying to solve a mystery from her grandmother's past while navigating through her own ever changing life.

This is the first book I've read by Ms. Jewell and I found it to be very entertaining. I liked both characters and found their stories to be intriguing. I thought the author did a great job of weaving together the past and the present. This story was a nice mix of a mystery and a love story. I look forward to reading more books by Ms. Jewell.

Many thanks to Atria, via Netgalley, for allowing me to read this in exchange for an unbiased review.

Holly says

I was expecting this to be better than what it was. It started off great but then somewhere in the middle I kind of lost interest. I wanted to know what happened so I kept reading but I didn't really get into the characters. Just finished with a lukewarm feeling overall. Just a little disappointed. The use of the f-word was over used as well, which became very irritating!

Resa says

Lisa Jewell has created an interesting story of 20-something Betty, leaving her home island of Gurnsey for the city of London to see what life has in store for her while trying to find the mysterious Clara Pickle, the woman her step-grandmother has left all her money to. The story takes Betty into 1920s London and a world of Jazz clubs and intrigue she didn't think her grandmother was capable of.

Unfortunately the novelty of the plot is all this novel has going for it. With flat, unrealistic characters, improbable romances with little chemistry, and little that leaves you invested in the outcome. I had high hopes for this book, but it did not deliver.

Obviously, as a Jewell book, this novel falls in the chick-lit, light side of literature. I didn't come to this book expecting it to be a great work (10) of literature like *The Luminaries* (also released in the US on 10.13) but I did expect a little more from it. Chick-lit lives and dies on the lovability of its characters and the reality of the romances. Betty starts off realistic and her relationship with grandmother Arlette makes the first third of this novel live up to what I thought the whole novel would be.

But. When Betty moves to London things just get weird. There's the somewhat irrelevant side story and rockstar Dom Jones. The tepid kind of sort of romance with John Brightly, and the odd assortment of neighbors that seem to be thrown in as a caricature of what people expect to read about city life that lack the description to make them believable.

Then there's the flashback to Arlette's story, which held up a little longer than Betty's but eventually fell in the trap of "hurry up and make a plot" and the characters started to fall apart, with an almost unbelievable rape side story that really caused the whole thing to take a strange (and confusing) turn.

The writing is done well and there are some chapters that make things interesting, but overall I finished the story more grateful it was over than excited about the outcome.

Scottsdale Public Library says

Before I Met You, by Lisa Jewell, is a story told by the alternating viewpoints of Betty, from the 1990s, and Arlette, Betty's grandmother, from the 1920s. The characters from both time periods are free spirited and independent, but Arlette is the one whose story was unexpectedly intriguing. Arlette lived in Soho during the early 1920s but left and lived the remainder of her life in Guernsey. Betty has been living on Guernsey since a young child and taken care of her grandmother. When Arlette dies, she leaves a small inheritance to Betty and also to an unknown person, Clara Pickle. With her inheritance, Betty moves to Soho to find Clara Pickle. Both Arlette and Betty left Guernsey to experience city life, have a career and find romance. Eventually, both have to make difficult choices that set the course for their futures.

I especially enjoyed the descriptions of life in London during the 1920s, but I would like to have learned more about what happened to Arlette after she returned to Guernsey. Overall, this book was a light and entertaining read. -Jacque C.

Tara Chevestt says

I bailed at 72%. I just really hated this book and its heroines. I will give it points for keeping me intrigued. After all, I kept plunging along even though I disliked its heroines. I kept thinking, "Well, I want to know what happened" even after I figured out who the mysterious Pickle lady was. It was so obvious.

But the heroines just totally suck. While I don't expect them to be perfect..they must have flaws as we all do, can they possibly be more unlikable and STUPID?

The modern-day girl--she constantly wants to remind us she "gave up her life" to care for an old lady. What does she want, a medal? She likes one guy but beds another. She can't wait for the old lady to die but then just sells the stuff she looked forward to acquiring. And the Soho bit...why the obsession with living in a place that is a "kingdom of sirens and neon and filth and chaos and double yellow lines as far as the eye could see"?

To say I don't get her or like her is an understatement. And the past story... The heroine is likable until she lets a man destroy her life. She is so weak it's disgusting. I hate women who allow themselves to be victims, who don't fight back. I wanted to throw up. And the romance was so dry... I failed to FEEL the love they supposedly had. Granted, he speaks politely to her and says things like "violent urge" but it's so dry and his character is so flat when it should be passionate and the romance totally misses the mark.

Just a total miss for me, but I dedicated four days to it so I'm posting my two cents. I hated it.

Sakinah says

It was totally unpredictable. You read it and think that you can see where it would take you but the truth is you are totally wrong and nothing from what you've guessed is true.

It took me by surprise in lots of pages and I was dreading to reach the end as I wasn't ready to gave my heart broken. .

I liked it so much. It was an enjoyable read and heartwarming even though there is some sadness in it. It is an underrated book and definitely needs more attention.

4.5

.5 is taken away because I wanted to know did that person killed herself really? And why

Susan says

I've read and enjoyed Lisa Jewell's books for more than ten years, and I highly recommend both **One-Hit Wonder** and **A Friend of the Family**. But **Before I Met You** left me cold. Jewell does a good job of portraying the combination of wide-eyed wonder, tinge of fear, and naive determination that both Betty, in the 1990s, and Arlette, in the 1920s, feel as young women on their own in a big city for the first time. She also keeps the pages turning to find out the mystery behind the beneficiary in Arlette's will who Betty is determined to find. But the narration is strangely distant from the characters, and I never felt fully connected to them. The object of Arlette's passion is more of a paragon than a real person. (view spoiler)In fact, none of the male characters work, with the exception of the taciturn young man who is one of the first people Betty encounters in her new life. All in all, not my favorite Lisa Jewell by far.

Diane Lochner says

Formulaic in the sense of "somewhat rootless and or aimless or temporarily lost or adrift young-ish woman moves away or moves home, only to find a tantalizing scrap of family or perfect stranger history that for unknown reasons compels her to find the whole truth and consumes her waking hours; she may not even know why she Has To Do This, except as the entire plot and purpose of the novel existing; that is, the waking hours she is not living a charmingly shabby chic life while juggling multiple possible love interests, only to finally tie the loose ends together, enlighten all those around her, and end up with Mr. Right after all" See also: Lake of Dreams, A Vintage Affair, Sarah's Key, the Art Forget, and The Secret Keeper.

This book just didn't do much for me, though the pace was brisk, and some of the writing quite descriptive; I do enjoy books set in London. Glad this one found a warmer audience with so many other readers, just wasn't one whose plot or writing moved me.

Bookread2day says

A marvellously written novel. Lisa Jewell is one of the best women writers. I always seem to be able to get into her books straight away. For any reader that has not read any of Lisa's book , please do try them all. I am sure readers and book clubs with love them all.

Hannah Fielding says

For me, curling up with a Lisa Jewell novel is like curling up with a coffee in front of a warm fire – comforting, cosy with the guarantee that it will warm the cockles of my heart. This book did not disappoint. Well-written, vivid and at once warm and funny and poignant and moving. It's a more mature read than some of Lisa's earlier novels – even with a relatively young heroine, it is less 'chicklit' in feel and deals with some serious rather than frivolous themes.

I especially enjoyed the dual points of view explored in the book – of Arlette, a young woman in 1920s London, and her step-granddaughter Betty, in 1990s London. There are wonderful parallels and also juxtaposition of the women's experiences that made for a compelling and powerful read. The characters are multi-faceted and realistic and likeable, and I was rather sad by the end of the book that their story had come to an end.

For me, the best part of this book is the sense of place that the author creates. I love the island of Guernsey, so I enjoyed the descriptions of that setting, but it is London that really comes alive on the pages. Having read this book soon after finishing *The Paris Wife*, which depicts 1920s Paris, I found myself drawing parallels and enjoying the glimpse of life in bohemian London during that era. I think the author does a marvellous job of capturing the heart of London – Soho – without over-romanticising it. Take the following extract:

All she knew was that the day was dying and the night was giving birth to itself, and there was something electric, something magnetic pulling her down Carnaby Street, past self-consciously crazy boutiques, past grimy pubs, through the throngs of tourists and teenage girls just like her, girls from somewhere else with overblown ideas of themselves, girls having a special treat with dowdy mothers and bored father, a day in

town with an early lunch at Garfunkel's, overfilled bowls from the salad bar, tickets for a West End show tucked safely in Mum's bum-bag. It wasn't real. Even to Betty's immature, small-town eyes she could see through the fakery and the stage setting. There was something both murky and beguiling beyond this plastic street of Union Jacks and Beatles posters, something grimy and fluttering.

By the end of the book, I found myself wanting to visit London and the locations that feature in the story, so alive did the characters feel to me.

Of course, at the heart of the story is romance – that of Arlette and of Betty – and indeed all sorts of relationship are explored in the novel. The result is a touching and memorable book that I recommend to any reader who enjoys romance.
